

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 26, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

As you know, Section 720 of the FY22 National Defense Authorization (PL 117-81) requires the Department of Defense to establish uniform procedures under which servicemembers may be exempted from the Department's COVID-19 vaccine mandate. To date, we have not seen such guidance and are past Secretary Lloyd Austin's arbitrary June 30th deadline for members of the National Guard and Reserve to be vaccinated, or be subject to penalties, including separation from service.

Approximately 11% of the National Guard and Reserves remains unvaccinated. The reluctance and refusal from some of these servicemembers to not be vaccinated comes from their personal spiritual beliefs and concerns about a vaccine that was initially developed and approved under expedited emergency-use authorization.

Some of these servicemembers have been previously exposed to COVID. Section 720 specifically asks the Department to consider whether this previous exposure induces sustained antibody protection, which may produce similar levels of immunity as the vaccine. At a time when the Department is struggling to recruit qualified young men and women fit for duty to fill the ranks, and while China is embarking on a massive military buildup which threatens American interests around the world, we should not be hindering our own readiness and capabilities by punishing and forcing out experienced and dedicated Guardsmen and Reservists.

Further, as a result of the June 30 deadline, unvaccinated Guardsmen and reservists are not authorized to participate in federal training and war games. Not only does this affect the service pay and retirement benefits of the individual servicemembers, it also negatively impacts the combat readiness of the units.

As a matter of national security, the capabilities and readiness of the fighting force, and respect for the personal rights of our men and women in uniform, we ask that you reconsider the Department's COVID vaccine mandate and issue uniform guidance that considers natural immunity.

Sincerely,



Michael Waltz
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Readiness

/s/

Mike Gallagher
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Military Personnel



Vicky Hartzler
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces



Doug Lamborn
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces

/s/

Jim Banks
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Cyber, Innovative Technologies,
and Information Systems



Rob Wittman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Seapower and
Projection Forces

/s/

Trent Kelly
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special Operations



Lisa McClain
Member of Congress



Stephanie Bice
Member of Congress



David Valadao
Member of Congress

/s/

Mike Johnson
Member of Congress



Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress

/s/

Jerry Carl
Member of Congress



Ronny L. Jackson
Member of Congress

/s/

Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



Bob Good
Member of Congress



Scott DesJarlais
Member of Congress



Dan Crenshaw
Member of Congress



Louie Gohmert
Member of Congress



Greg Steube
Member of Congress



Lauren Boebert
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Diana Harshberger
Member of Congress



Mark E. Green, M.D.
Member of Congress



Andy Barr
Member of Congress



Billy Long
Member of Congress



Bill Huizenga
Member of Congress

/s/

Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



John Rutherford
Member of Congress



Ted Budd
Member of Congress

Guy Reschenthaler
Member of Congress

/s/

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress

Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress

Jake LaTurner
Member of Congress

Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Member of Congress

Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress

/s/

Ben Cline
Member of Congress

Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress

Brian Mast
Member of Congress

Troy Nehls
Member of Congress



Ken Buck
Member of Congress

/s/

Warren Davidson
Member of Congress



Bill Posey.
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Chip Roy
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Kevin Hern
Member of Congress



Michael Guest
Member of Congress



Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress



Randy Weber
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Christine Wormuth
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